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COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
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JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Iran
- [1](#)3. Proposed Baghdad Conference

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Key stories in the media:  
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The Jerusalem Post reported that an agreement has been reached with Hamas over the number of prisoners Israel will release in return for Cpl. Gilad Shalit and that the exchange may take place in the coming weeks. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli defense officials as saying that the prisoner swap will be conducted in three stages: Israel will first release prisoners as a gesture to PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas; Shalit will then be released into Egyptian custody; and Israel will then release several hundred additional prisoners, mostly affiliated with Hamas. However, the newspaper said that officials in the Prime Minister's Office denied that the meeting planned for next week between PM Ehud Olmert and Abbas has anything to do with Shalit, although there has been speculation to that effect regarding the meeting, taking place as it is before the establishment of a PA unity government.

Maariv cited Israel's anger over the disappearance of USD 100 million that Israel had transferred a few weeks ago to Abbas. The newspaper said that the money had been earmarked for specific purposes. Maariv reported that senior sources in Jerusalem accuse the Palestinians of having deceived Israel. Maariv said that Israel will not transfer any more funds to Abbas.

Ha'aretz reported that the five permanent UN Security Council (UNSC) members and Germany are drafting a new resolution against Iran which may for the first time include all UN members in a weapons embargo on Tehran. Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday sources in New York estimated that Russia -- strongly opposed to the draft initiated by the United States -- might go along with the resolution if it is restricted to an embargo on Iran's export of weapons. The newspaper wrote that efforts are underway to reach an agreement regarding Iran's import of weapons. The new resolution would request UN members to remain alert and implement tight oversight and inspection to foil Iranian attempts to procure weapons. Ha'aretz cited the belief of sources in the UN that a final draft of the new resolution will be brought up for discussion in the Security Council no sooner than the end of March. The new resolution draft is a reaction to Iran's refusal to abide by UNSC Resolution 1737, passed last December, demanding that it halt its uranium enrichment program. Ha'aretz quoted IDF OC Southern Command Yoav Gallant as saying on Wednesday that Iran is helping Hamas upgrade its military capabilities by providing technology, funding and direct military training to Palestinian militants throughout the Middle East.

The Jerusalem Post's web site reported that a senior US official told The Washington Post on Thursday that missing Iranian general Ali Rez Asghari (phon.) was in Western hands and providing intelligence services with information about Hizbullah, Iran and the ties between the two. It was the first time since Asghari's disappearance last month, during a visit to Turkey, that a western official confirmed his fate. Another US official, who spoke to The Washington Post on the condition of anonymity, suggested that Asghari's disappearance was voluntary and orchestrated by Israel. The Israeli government denied any connection to Asghari. The Jerusalem Post quoted said Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mark Regev as saying: "To my knowledge, Israel is not involved in any way in this disappearance."

Leading media quoted Jordan's King Abdullah II as saying in Washington on Wednesday that Jordan's King Abdullah II said yesterday the United States must take the lead in creating conditions for a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The King, who addressed a joint session of the US Congress, cited the risks of further delay. Abdullah was quoted as saying that history has shown no progress in Middle East peacemaking is possible without American leadership. "We look to you to play a historic role," he was quoted as saying, adding that results are needed not in one year or five years, but now. "No more bloodshed, no more lives pointlessly taken," Abdullah declared. Ha'aretz noted that his remarks were limited almost entirely to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that they were far less critical of Israel than comments he made before his departure for Washington. Yediot quoted the prosecutor at Jordan's National Security Court as saying that President Bush escaped an assassination attempt last November, during a visit to Amman.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday Israel has warned its citizens to immediately leave Egypt and Jordan, the only Arab states



with which it has full ties, out of concern they could come under attack. The advisory was issued on the recommendation of the Counter-Terrorism Unit at Israel's National Security Council, which this week placed Egypt and Jordan in its highest threat category, but gave no further details.

Ha'aretz printed an AP wire report that on Wednesday Syria, through its government newspaper Tishrin, voiced opposition to making any revisions to the Arab-Israeli peace initiative endorsed by Arab leaders five years ago and cast doubts over Israel's willingness to make peace in region.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu launched fresh attacks against Olmert, saying the government had failed and calling for new elections. Netanyahu was quoted as saying that he had been passed information that "a number of Kadima Knesset members were interested in returning to the Likud, which they left together with former PM Ariel Sharon. However, Netanyahu stressed that he was not actively involved in recruiting them. Israel Radio reported that Olmert's nephew Yair was leaving Kadima.

Major media reported that on Wednesday the Israel Air Force began receiving a new drone into its ranks -- the Heron. The new UAV is capable of carrying 250 kg of ordnance and equipment. Produced by Israel Aircraft Industries, it can fly at 30,000 feet and can stay aloft for as long as 40 hours. It also has sophisticated surveillance and communications equipment. Ha'aretz quoted Israeli military sources as saying that Herons first saw extensive combat actions during last year's Lebanon war, when they were used to relay footage on Hizbullah guerrillas to Israeli ground forces.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday the High Court of Justice ordered Shin Bet interrogators to inform a Palestinian detainee that his wife had not been arrested and placed under interrogation, as they had previously told him.

Ha'aretz reported that Olmert told the Winograd Commission investigating last year's war in Lebanon that his decision to respond to the abduction of soldiers with a broad military operation was made as early as March 2006, four months before last summer's Lebanon war broke out.

Yediot reported that Egypt banned 2,000 pilgrims -- Egyptian Copts and Greek Orthodox -- from coming to Israel for Easter. Leading media reported that on Wednesday Israel's Ambassador to Egypt Shalom Cohen strenuously denied claims that Israel had murdered Egyptian prisoners during the Six-Day War. Israel Radio reported that the Foreign Ministry has sent Egypt a copy of the Israel TV documentary reporting on the alleged episode.

The Jerusalem Post cited Israel Military Industries (IMI) as saying that a new type of armor it produces can help the US diminish the threat of improvised explosive devices (IED) in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Jerusalem Post quoted IMI sources as saying that the specially designed Steel Wall armor significantly improves a vehicle's ability to survive an IED attack.

Maariv reported that associates of oligarch Leonid Nevzlin, a former Russian citizen living in Israel, believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to physically eliminate him.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday an Israeli Foreign Ministry official characterized as "troubling" a BBC survey released earlier this week that ranked Israel alongside Iran and the US as the countries with the most negative images in the world. The official was quoted as saying: "Both Israel and the United States are higher than 50 percent [in negative views], so in many ways, we are in good company. The Jerusalem Post quoted Government Press Office Danny Seaman as saying that the survey was not "systematic" and "in-depth."

Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll, which asked Israelis to name their favorite politician. Twenty-two percent chose FM Tzipi Livni; 18 percent pointed at Labor Party MK Ami Ayalon. With 2 percent, Olmert ranked lowest in the survey.



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11. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Syrian-American rift has been mended."

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz: "Israel under Olmert's leadership is struck by blindness and is stewing in its own rot."

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz: "It is difficult not to see [the] ever-tightening circle in which most branches of the government are participating as part of a general trend -- which will not succeed -- to subdue the entire settlement enterprise."

Block Quotes:  
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11. "Quiet, They're Talking With Syria"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/8): "Not long after the first Ha'aretz report about the Swiss channel, [private Israeli negotiator Alon] Liel was invited to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv to report on his contacts with the Syrians. The meeting was attended by the Embassy's entire political staff, apart from the Ambassador. But that was just the beginning. Nicholas Lang, the Swiss diplomat who acted as the contact between the Israeli participants and the Syrian regime, was summoned to Washington and updated senior State Department and National Security Council officials on the details of the talks and their results. He arrived in the US shortly after a farewell visit to Damascus, and prior to taking up his new posting as the Swiss ambassador to several African countries. Another sign that the Syrian-American rift has been mended can be seen in Damascus' receipt of an invitation to send a representative to the conference to resolve the Iraq crisis. And finally, a further indication is the dispatch of Assistant US Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey for a working visit in the Syrian capital. The State Department Spokesman did take the trouble to clarify that this is not a 'bilateral visit'.... The US already surprised Israel recently when Jerusalem received news of the conciliation between the US and Qadhafi's Libya. An Israeli official who recently visited Washington relates that his counterparts in the US administration joked with him that the US is talking with Syria, but asked him 'not to tell anyone.'"

II. "No Compass, No Conscience"

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz (3/8): "Against the increasingly growing threats, Olmert's Israel is behaving like an ostrich: It does not see, it does not hear and it does not do. The bug of government negligence is running amok in Jerusalem: an absence of leadership bug, an absence of governance -- anarchy. This anarchy is what brought us the second Lebanon war. It is what caused the war to be managed the way it was. But much worse is the fact that even after the war, the anarchy continues. It has grown even while the writing is on the wall. Every day of anarchy brings us closer to the next disaster -- a catastrophe for which every one

who remains silent now is responsible. Now that the Olmert era has become a nightmare era, the question of whether Olmert is right or wrong is irrelevant.... No one knows when reality will strike, but it is clear that reality will strike. Olmert-led Israel is not prepared for such a strike, and it is not prepared to deal with it. Israel under Olmert's leadership is struck by blindness and is stewing in its own rot."

III. "Subduing the Settlement Enterprise"

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz (3/8): "In the wake of a petition filed by the Israeli Arab legal center Adalah about a year ago, the High Court of Justice ruled that the government must abolish the 'national preference' regions in education.... The primary -- and apparently only -- institutions that will be negatively affected by this will be the educational institutions in



the settlements.... Abolishing the educational benefits for settlers comes after the traumatic events of the uprooting of 25 communities in Gush Katif and the failure, to this day, to adequately cope with those who were uprooted.... It is difficult not to see this ever-tightening circle in which most branches of the government are participating as part of a general trend -- which will not succeed -- to subdue the entire settlement enterprise."

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12. Iran:  
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Summary:  
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The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized:  
"Pacifism ... is the driving force behind European animus toward both the US and Israel."

Block Quotes:  
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"Europe's Israel Problem"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/8):  
"Two recent polls tell us what we already knew: Israel is relatively popular among Americans and the subject of considerable antipathy among European democracies. The data suggest that Americans see themselves with Israelis in the same boat, while Europeans have an almost opposite point of view. Why is this so and what, if anything, can be done about it?.... Perhaps the best explanation, then, is one given by Stephan Vopel of the German Bertelsmann Foundation for why many more Americans and Israelis favor a military strike against Iran than Germans: 'While Israelis subscribe to the maxim 'never again,' the German dictum is 'never again war.' Pacifism, in other words, is the driving force behind European animus toward both the US and Israel. Europeans realize that Iran is a threat, but they are almost as, if not more, opposed to confronting that threat than they are fearful of the threat itself. The US and Israel, as the nations that are perceived both as Iran's main targets and as those most actively fighting back, are threats to the European strategy of lying low and hoping that their adversary will go away. Further, America and Israel are both seen as provoking Iran and therefore making things worse.... Ultimately, it will be difficult to convince Europeans that they need to help defend Israel, at least morally, when they do not accept the need to defend themselves. Such, however, is the struggle of free peoples in our age, a struggle that must be won."

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13. Proposed Baghdad Conference:  
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Summary:  
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Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "What Iran and Syria expect to get in exchange does not belong to the Iraqi domain, but to places like Lebanon, the Persian Gulf, etc."

Block Quotes:  
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"The Baghdad Conference and the Missing Seat"

Former Mossad director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (3/8): "American spokesmen are taking care to stress that no topics except Iraq will be discussed at the [proposed Baghdad] conference-- in particular there will be no bilateral contacts between Iran and the US, and between Syria and the US on other issues. Reality might be different: Iran and Syria can significantly contribute to a reduction of violence in Iraq. Their cooperation is likely to be an offering for which something is



expected in exchange. What Iran and Syria expect to get in exchange does not belong to the Iraqi domain, but to places like Lebanon, the Persian Gulf, etc. One should assume that Israel expects the US administration not to hold talks in Baghdad on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This will not happen officially. But is it not logical that there will be opportunities to discuss every possible issue outside the [conference] hall?.... Against this background, Israel's absence from Baghdad is patent. Substantially, Israel has the right to be there -- no less and perhaps more than some of the other invited parties. The 39 missiles fired at Israel's territory during the first Gulf War should have granted Israel the right to a seat at that meeting. Why have we been still?"

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